

# Great Falls Park

## Virginia

George Washington Memorial Parkway, VA  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior



Dear Friends:

For many of us, Great Falls Park, Virginia, holds a special place in our lives. It is a place unlike any other with dramatic vistas of the Potomac, as the river builds up speed and force, tumbling over jagged and steep rocks, and roaring through a narrow gorge. Each year, more than 500,000 people come to this 800- acre park to discover the early- American engineering feat known as the Patowmack Canal. They also come to hike, ride horseback, climb rocks, kayak or picnic, or to simply enjoy the spectacular views of the falls and the river.

Over the past few years, several planning projects have been initiated at the park. These include: rehabilitation of the overlook areas; installation of new information kiosks near the overlooks; stabilization of canal walls; renovations to the visitor center; and replacement of the existing radio tower by Verizon, with a cell tower that is designed to look like a tree.

We feel this is the appropriate time to take a more comprehensive look at the entire park and explore the range of resource conditions and visitor experiences that should be achieved and maintained over time. Our goal is to develop a General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) that will provide guidance on how best to protect the park's resources, serve the needs of our visitors, and address the concerns of our neighbors. To achieve this, we will work closely with the general public, federal, state, and local agencies, community groups, and park partners.

This newsletter is one of the initial steps towards providing you with more information about the plan. It includes information about the GMP/EIS process, a brief planning history of the park, and the purpose and significance of the park. Also, the park staff has developed a list of preliminary issues that will be addressed in the plan. A few of these are identified in this newsletter. At this time, we invite your participation in this planning effort. Please share those aspects of the park that you enjoy, as well as any concerns and issues that you, as a park user or neighbor, think should be addressed in the plan. You can participate by responding through the comment form in this newsletter, attending the Scoping Meeting planned for January 28th, 2003, or commenting through the park's website (<http://www.nps.gov/grfa>). You can also contact us via either of these options, if you would like to be on our mailing list.

The preparation of the GMP/EIS is anticipated to last approximately two years. Throughout this process, we will provide you with periodic updates and seek your input at key planning stages.

We appreciate your comments and look forward to working together as we plan for Great Falls Park's future.

Sincerely,

Audrey F. Calhoun  
Superintendent, George Washington Memorial Parkway

### CONTACT US

For more information, please contact **Deborah Feldman**, Park Planner, GWMP or **Dottie Marshall**, Deputy Superintendent, GWMP, at 703.289.2500, or check our website at the following web address:  
<http://www.nps.gov/grfa>

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## WHAT IS A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN?

A General Management Plan provides a vision for the future of a park unit and a practical framework for decision-making. It provides guidance on how to best protect park resources, provide for quality visitor experiences, and manage visitation and visitor use. This plan will involve identifying goals based on legislative intent of the park, analyzing existing conditions and future possibilities, and determining the best course of action to accomplish these goals. The plan will not include facility design, resolution of all identified issues, or guarantee funding for the park. Rather, it will describe the general path the National Park Service (NPS) intends to follow in managing Great Falls Park over the next 10 to 15 years.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental impact statement will be prepared concurrently with the GMP. This EIS will identify significant issues and concerns facing the park, present a reasonable range of management alternatives, and analyze the effects of the alternatives.

Public involvement will be a key component in the preparation of the GMP/EIS. This newsletter provides information on the planning process and how you can be involved in that process.



*Patowmack Canal - Lock Walls*

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## BRIEF PLANNING HISTORY OF THE PARK

In 1930, Congress passed the Capper-Cramton Act authorizing the acquisition, establishment, and development of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. This Act included a specific provision for the future “protection and preservation of the natural scenery of the Gorge and the Great Falls of the Potomac and the preservation of the historic Patowmack Canal.” A subsequent amendment (Public Law 699, 79<sup>th</sup> Congress) mandated the NPS to preserve the canal.

In 1952, Fairfax County, Virginia, purchased 16 of the 800 acres of land now known as Great Falls Park, from the owner Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO). In

1960, the NPS leased the remaining 784 acres from PEPCO. Subsequently, in 1966, the NPS purchased the land and started operations of Great Falls Park as a unit of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Between 1952 and 1972, Fairfax County operated a carousel on this property until it was destroyed in 1972 by Hurricane Agnes.

Today, Great Falls Park is managed as a natural, historic and recreational area. The remains of the Patowmack Canal, former community of Matildaville, and associated ruins are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Patowmack Canal has been designated a National Historic Landmark and a National Historical Civil Engineering Landmark.

For the past five years, members of the NPS Historic Preservation Training Center have been implementing a five-year stabilization/restoration plan for sections of the Patowmack Canal walls.

Currently, plans are underway to replace exhibits in the park’s visitor center, as well as those scattered throughout the park.

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## PURPOSES OF THE PARK

Purpose statements provide the foundation for management and use of each unit of the National Park System. The following draft purpose statements for Great Falls Park are based on the Capper-Cramton Act of 1930 and laws and policies governing the management of all national parks.

Great Falls Park was established by Congress as a site within George Washington Memorial Parkway, to preserve and protect the natural scenery of the Potomac River Gorge, the Great Falls of the Potomac River, and the historic Patowmack Canal for future generations. This upland piedmont forest has been the focal point throughout human history: from the Native Americans who utilized the ravine and woodland resources; through the efforts of George Washington to construct a canal that circumvented the falls; to the preservation and recreational activities of recent generations. The park’s notable features provide visitors with an opportunity for recreation in a superlative green space within the metropolitan Washington D.C. area. Visitors have opportunities to gain an understanding of the natural and cultural resources, and the social, and political values of the American people.

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## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARK

Significance statements identify the resources and values central to managing the park and express the importance of the park in relation to our natural and cultural heritage.

- Great Falls Park contributes to creating and preserving the spectacular scenic views of the Potomac River Falls, the Potomac River Gorge, and the Potomac Palisades.
- The park contains one of the first canal systems built in the country (1785- 1802) often referred to as George Washington’s “Dream Canal”. This National Historic

Landmark was one of the first river navigational systems that supported trade with the Ohio River Valley.

- Despite its location in an expanding metropolitan area, the Potomac Gorge is one of the most noteworthy natural areas in the National Park System. It extends 15 miles along the Potomac River, from a location above Great Falls, south to Theodore Roosevelt Island. Due to the unusual hydrogeology, the Gorge is one of the country's most biologically diverse areas that serves as a confluence for more than 200 rare plant species and biological communities.
- The park is within the Potomac River watershed, which covers approximately 14,670 square miles in four states (Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Pennsylvania). The Potomac River is the second largest contributor to the Chesapeake Bay.
- Great Falls Park protects Native American artifacts in their original locations.
- Great Falls Park offers a diversity of resource-based recreational experiences in close proximity to the nation's capital. Activities range from picnicking, birding, guided ranger programs, hiking, horseback riding to bicycling through scenic wooded trails, rock climbing along the Gorge, and white water activities on the river.



Visitors on a Hiking Trail

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process involves several broad steps. During the first step, the planning team reaffirms the purpose, significance, and mission of the park; identifies issues and desired futures; and collects data related to the issues. The next step includes compiling and analyzing public comments on issues; and identifying alternative approaches for managing the park. Another step consists of identifying a preferred management alternative and preparing a draft GMP/EIS that evaluates the environmental impacts of the alternatives and is made available to the public for comments. Subsequently, a final GMP/EIS is prepared that includes responses to public comments on the draft

document. The final step is the publication of the Record of Decision, signed by the Regional Director, that is announced in the Federal Register.

Activity	Anticipated Date	Public Involvement
Gather information/ identify issues	Winter 02/03	Scoping meeting, Newsletter & website input
Develop & evaluate alternatives	Winter 02/03 to Spring 03	Public meeting, Newsletter & website input
Identify a preferred alternative; prepare draft GMP/EIS	Spring to Fall 03	Public review of draft, public meeting & website input
Revise & publish final GMP/EIS	Winter 03 to Summer 04	Final Plan distributed to public
Record of Decision	Fall to Winter 04	Notice in Federal Register

## WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED?

The following are representative of the preliminary issues to be addressed in this GMP/EIS. We would like your ideas and comments on these and any additional issues and concerns that you may have.

### *Access and Circulation*

**Vehicular Access to the Park:** Old Dominion Drive provides the only public vehicular access to the park. During peak visitation periods, traffic back ups can extend over a mile. This adversely affects visitors, neighboring residents and emergency access to the park. **Social Trails:** There are multiple locations in the park where visitors wander away from designated trails and create 'social' trails. A number of these social trails have the potential to damage significant cultural and sensitive natural resources.

### *Natural & Cultural Resource Management*

**Conflict between Natural & Cultural Resources:** Existing native vegetation, such as large established trees that grow on the walls of the Patowmack Canal, can significantly damage the structural integrity of the cultural resources. The park has a mandate to preserve both natural and cultural resources, which often conflict with each other, presenting a management challenge. **Impact of Rock Climbing on Sensitive Vegetation and Wildlife:** Existing and increasing demands for rock climbing cause concern due to the sensitive ecosystem that exists along the edge of the Gorge.

### *Visitor Activities*

**Visitor Safety:** There have been several cases where visitors have suffered serious injuries while participating in activities along the river. **Conflict Between Trail Users:** The park staff often finds bikers or horse riders on trails that are designated for pedestrian use only.

### *Facilities*

**Inadequate Comfort Facilities:** Existing comfort (restroom) facilities are inadequate to handle the amount of visitors accessing the park during peak periods and special events.

# YOU ARE INVITED

Please come and provide us with your comments at the public scoping meeting to be held at:

## THE GREAT FALLS GRANGE AND OLD SCHOOLHOUSE

9818 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls, VA.

on

**January 28th, 2003 from 7:00 p.m to 9:00 p.m.**



Visitors at one of the Overlook Areas - Viewing the Great Falls

*You can also provide us with your feedback through the following:*

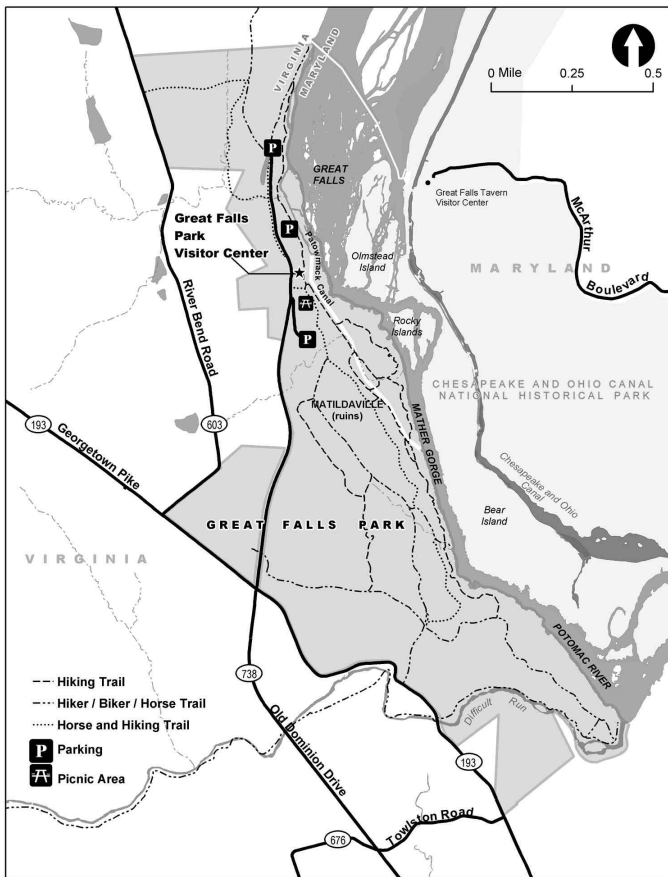
**I** Record your comments on the enclosed comment form and mail it back to us.

AND/OR

**2** Comment via the Internet to  
**GWMP\_Superintendent@nps.gov**  
(Please include "Attn: Great Falls GMP Team" and your name and return address in your Internet message.)



Superintendent Audrey Calhoun  
George Washington Memorial Parkway  
c/o Turkey Run Park  
McLean, Virginia 22101



Map of Great Falls Park, Virginia

## Comment Form

Please provide your comments via email to [GWMP\\_Superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:GWMP_Superintendent@nps.gov) or use the reverse of this page to record your comments and ideas about future management for Great Falls Park. Please also provide your name and address to be added to our mailing list. If you need more space, please attach additional pages to the reverse of this form. When finished, fold the form on the line, tape it closed, and mail. No postage is required. In order for your comments to be considered, please mail this form back by **February 21st, 2003** (post-marked).

Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of commentators, available for public review during regular business hours. Individuals may request that we withhold their home address from the Record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There may also be instances in which we would withhold a commentator's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address from the Record, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. Thank you.

### AREAS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE PLAN

The plan area includes Great Falls Park, Virginia. The Potomac River bounds the park on the east, Route 193 defines the southwest edge of the park, Old Dominion Drive and River Bend Road are located to the west and north.

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*Tape on this Side*